

## Bullies and Bruisers

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### Bullies & Bruisers Beware

**Fact:** Bullying happens to someone in Canada every seven minutes on the playground. (Bullying.org)

We've all heard of the parent from Ottawa who was sentenced in 2005 to 18 months' probation for shoving a referee into a doorframe after his son was thrown out of a minor league hockey game. Bullying is learned behaviour. Child bullies are likely not taught how to communicate their needs, wants and goals in a healthy fashion. They may have watched their parents' bully-like interactions with others and learned to mimic the behaviour. "Children watch their parents giving each other the silent treatment or talking poorly about friends and neighbours behind their backs," says Lynn Glazier, a Canadian filmmaker who is known for the 2004 documentary *It's a Girl's World*. "Children internalize all these messages into their own social scripts."

The Canada Safety Council defines bullying as a "grab for control by an insecure, inadequate person, an exercise of power through the humiliation of the target." So bullying can be as obvious as a shove on the ice or it can take the form of intimidation, fear tactics, shaming and silencing. It's assumed that a bully picks on people who are weaker - misfits or loners. Instead, the Canada Safety Council says that bullies often choose targets who are capable and dedicated people, or intelligent and attractive, whose interpersonal style tends to be non-confrontational. Your bully may be jealous of your player's ability or outstanding teamwork or may be attempting to disrupt their otherwise calm demeanor.

Here are five steps you can take to prevent bullying or to stop it from interfering with your child's hockey enjoyment and growth.

#### Set an example

This seems obvious, but make certain through your own behaviour that your kids know it's not OK to be a bully and that it's not healthy to be a bullying victim. Create conversational space to allow your children to express what is upsetting to them and guide them to resolve issues in a positive manner.

#### Do your homework

Try to select teams and coaches that have a zero-tolerance rule on bullying to prevent the problem in the first place. Even informal chats with other parents and players will give you some insight into the team culture.

#### Not a bullying bystander

"Even if they don't join in the bullying, bystanders become a huge problem because they're no support," says Karen Learmonth, co-head of No Bully for Me, a Canadian support group based in Vancouver ([www.nobullyforme.org](http://www.nobullyforme.org)). She says that targets of bullying feel they have no one to turn to and no one to trust. Your team will play stronger if no one player allows a bully to drag down the morale of any one player. Remember the story of the two Nova Scotia teens that were supported by their entire school after they were bullied for wearing pink. There is strength in numbers.

#### Take action right away

The same rule that applies for training a dog - saying "no" at the exact moment bad behaviour happens—holds true for bullying. The longer the behavior goes unremarked or unpunished, the longer it's assumed it is okay, the longer it'll continue. Award-winning Canadian site [bullying.org](http://bullying.org) says that the fear-laden belief that "If I tell someone, it will just make it worse"—is a myth. In fact, the site asserts that research proves that bullying will stop when adults in authority and peers get involved. Create space for your son or daughter to express what is bothering them and to describe the bullying they are experiencing. Whether on the ice or through remote delivery like (ie.cyber bullying), swift, effective action is key to stopping the behaviour.

#### Resources

Here are some further resources to keep your children on the ice and enjoying the game. While we do not control the content of these sites, they are valuable resources to help stop bullying.

- [kidshelpphone.ca](http://kidshelpphone.ca)
- [bullying.org](http://bullying.org)
- [helpstopbullying.freeforums.org](http://helpstopbullying.freeforums.org)
- [www.deal.org/e/about/](http://www.deal.org/e/about/)
- [www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)

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